

Wild Acres – Habichat

For stewards of Maryland's backyard wildlife

Vol. 8 No. 1, Summer 2002

In This Issue...

Native Plant Profile

Feeding Birds ... Not Squirrels

Potpourri

Welcome to the first issue of Habichat for the 21st century. Habichat is being brought back after an absence of several years, but judging by the calls and conversations I have had with "Wild Acres" people, you look forward to the issues. This newsletter is for YOU, the person that wants to enjoy wildlife on their property; no matter what the size may be: a large property in the country or a window box in the urban area.

We want to hear from you! Letters, e-mail, photos, drawings, letting us know in the Wild Acres Program and share with other Wild Acres people the success you are having with developing wildlife habitat on your property.

HABITAT - the arrangement of food, water, cover, and space - **IS THE KEY!** We want to use this newsletter to serve as a location to share ideas, information and ask questions and hopefully give some answers to your habitat and wildlife gardening concerns.

With that said, I hope to hear from the Wild Acres people that want to share or ask questions. **Write to Me!** Marilyn Mause, Wild Acres Program, DNR, Wildlife & Heritage Service, Gwynnbrook WMA, 3740 Gwynnbrook Ave, Owings Mills MD 21117, 410-356-0941

E-Mail: customerservice@dnr.state.md.us



Native Plant Profile.....

..... *Sassafras (sassafras albidum)*

Aromatic tree. Grows to 30 feet in 30 years. Highly sought after for its berries by bluebirds and thrushes. Striking flame orange fall color and disease free. Well balanced up sweeping branching habit. Good substitute for flowering dogwood. Tolerant of a wide variety of PH on well-drained soils in sunlight or shade.

Flowers: Bright yellow starbursts in early spring before leaves emerge.

Fruits: Dark blue drupe on red pedicels (stalks) August - September.

Landscape Notes: A great small tree for use as understory and edge naturalizing, as hedgerow or as a single specimen plant. Fall color, berries and early spring flowers and disease free "catchers mitt" leaves provide yearlong ornamental interest.

Sassafras provides food for: thrushes, bluebirds, fruit, upland game birds including quail, turkey and grouse, small mammals including mice, chipmunks, squirrels, rabbits and deer.

Sassafras provides nesting and shelter for: most songbirds, small cavity dwelling owls (older trees).

Bees favor the nectar of the blossoms, and birds the glossy fruits. Fruits blue, berrylike. It grows along fence rows and roads, in abandoned fields, and in other open or semi-open places. The dark bluish fruits of sassafras ripening in the fall are eaten by various birds. The kingbird, crested flycatcher, and phoebe eat fruits.

Fruit - Songbirds - Catbird, flicker, crested flycatcher, kingbird, mockingbird, eastern phoebe, sapsucker, brown thrasher, gray-checked thrush, hermit thrush, olive-backed thrush, towhee, red-eyed vireo, white-eyed vireo, pileated woodpecker, yellow-throat warbler. Fruit, bark, wood - Fur and game mammals - black bear, beaver, rabbit, and squirrels. Twigs, foliage - deer.

Sassafras is a long-lived and moderately fast growing tree, and it is virtually pest and disease free. It repels mosquitoes and other insects, so it is a beneficial companion plant in the garden. Some butterflies use sassafras as the "host" plant for their caterpillars. It prefers dry soils in abandoned fields and on open, eroded slopes. The dark blue, berrylike fruit is eaten by at least 18 species of birds. It frequently pioneers old fields where it is important to wildlife as a browse plant. Greenish- yellow flowers appear in March and April as the leaves unfold. The fruit matures in August and September. The bark, twigs and leaves of sassafras are important foods for wildlife in some areas. Deer browse the twigs in the winter and the leaves and succulent growth during spring and summer.

FEEDING BIRDS ... NOT SQUIRRELS

By Tom Franklin, The Wildlife Authority

Many people who feed wild birds become frustrated by the ability of pesky squirrels to outwit our best attempts to exclude them from our feeders. It's not so much that we begrudge these acrobatic rodents from a meal; we just don't care to see them dominating the feeders that we intend for our colorful feathered neighbors.

Homeowners frequently come to The Wildlife Authority in Ellicott City to ask for advice on this vexing problem. In response, I have designed a fool-system for feeding cardinals, blue jays, chickadees, red-bellied woodpeckers and most desirable songbirds while excluding gray squirrels, chipmunks, rats and mice that can sometimes be a nuisance.

Begin by selecting a place in your yard that is 10 feet away from the nearest branch or tree from which a squirrel can jump. This includes the space above your feeder. The following drawing depicts the supplies that you will need, including:

- A steel pole at least 6 feet in length and 1 inch or more in diameter on which all accessories will be mounted.
- A metal squirrel baffle. It can be either the conical or "stove pipe" style. The baffle rests on a collar that also slides over the pole. The top of the baffle should be located at least 4 1/2 feet from the ground to prevent squirrels from jumping on top of it.
- A seed catching tray with hole in center. This tray slides over the top of the pole and rests on a flange beneath the tray.
- A squirrel resistant feeder. The best kind has a perch that closes off access to food when a squirrel (or heavy bird) grasps the perch. Other hopper-type feeders also work well with this system.

Drive or cement the pole 12" into the ground. Each item should be mounted on the pole, beginning with the baffle, which is the item closest to the ground.

That's all you need. Just fill your feeder with good quality seed, wait for the birds to arrive, and enjoy many hours of bird viewing. You also may feel some sense of satisfaction as you watch the antics of the squirrels attempting to defeat (unsuccessfully) your new rodent-proof system. But most of all have fun!

Tom Franklin is a Certified Wildlife Biologist and President of the Wildlife Authority, a wild bird/nature retail store located in Ellicott City, MD.

Potpourri

Here is a listing of phone numbers, web sites and organizations that you might find helpful or interesting in your search for ideas to manage your wild acres. **DNR Online...** Inspired by nature! www.dnr.state.md.us.

National Wildlife Federation - Details on their backyard habitat program www.nwf.org or call them at 1-800-822-9919.

Native plants - **The Maryland Native Plant Society** offers information dedicated to protecting, conserving and restoring Maryland's native plants and habitats, visit them at www.mdflora.org.

Maryland Cooperative Extension offers home and garden information, tips publications, plant problems, Bay issues, and other links at www.agnr.umd.edu/MCE/index.cfm Their **Home and Garden Information** number is statewide and can be reached at 1-800-342-2507, and from outside Maryland at 1-410-531-1757.

Maryland's "**Becoming an Outdoors - Woman Program**" - One of the topics covered in the three-day workshops is Backyard Wildlife. For more information on this program contact Karina Blizzard at 301-478-2146 or send e-mail to: kblizzard@dnr.state.md.us.

For more information on butterflies - visit the **North American Butterfly Association** at www.naba.org

Warm season grasses and wild meadows for upland nesting birds visit **Pheasants Forever** at www.pheasantsforever.org or e-mail: pf@pheasantsforever.org

Habichat, the newsletter for Wild Acres participants, is published by the Wildlife and Heritage Service, Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Editor: Marilyn Mause

The facilities and services of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources are available to all without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age, national origin, physical or mental disability. This document is available in alternative format upon request from a qualified individual with a disability.

Wild Acres Program

Maryland Wildlife and Heritage Service

Attn: Marilyn Mause

Gwynnbrook WMA

3740 Gwynnbrook Ave

Owings Mills MD 21117

410-356-0941

E-Mail:

customerservice@dnr.state.md.us

**For additional information about the Wild Acres Program
and for back issues of HABICHAT, Visit us on the DNR Website.**

<http://www.dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/wildacres.asp>

